

Town of



Amherst Massachusetts

OFFICE OF THE SELECT BOARD

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Amherst Black History Month Proclamation February 2017

Whereas, since the Bicentennial year of 1976, Americans of all walks of life have come together during the month of February “to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history,”

Whereas these accomplishments are the more remarkable for having been won at the cost of great struggle and sacrifice by men and women who came to these shores in chains, and by their descendants,

Whereas the authors of these accomplishments in Massachusetts history include:

- Phillis Wheatley, the first African American to publish a book of poetry;
- Crispus Attucks, the first causality of the American Revolution;
- Edward Jones of Amherst College, the second African American to earn a college degree;
- Edmonia Lewis, the first professional African American sculptor, who learned her craft in Boston;
- The members of the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, the first and most famous unit of African American Union soldiers raised in the Civil War
- Jan Matzeliger, inventor who revolutionized the shoe manufacturing industry;
- W. E. B Du Bois, pioneering scholar and civil rights activist;
- Edward Brooke, the first African American senator elected by popular vote;
- Deval Patrick, the second elected African American governor in the nation

Whereas captive Africans and free people of color were already part of the Amherst story in the Colonial era,

Whereas the African American residents of Amherst have fought for our collective defense and freedom from the Revolution and Civil War to the present,

Whereas the African American community—some of whose distinguished figures are depicted on the History Mural in West Cemetery—continues to contribute to the rich diversity and general welfare of both the Town of Amherst and the Commonwealth,

Whereas, to its shame, Massachusetts participated in the slave trade since 1638, but to its honor, in 1783 became the first state in the new nation to abolish slavery as “inconsistent with our own conduct and Constitution,” thereby demonstrating our determination to live up to our historical ideals as we strive to build a better common future,

Whereas, as President Barack Obama has proclaimed, “Every American can draw strength from the story of hard-won progress, which not only defines the African-American experience, but also lies at the heart of our Nation as a whole,”

Now, therefore, we the Select Board of the Town of Amherst, do hereby proclaim February 2017 as Black History Month, and urge all residents to mark this occasion, and to participate fittingly in its observance, beginning with a flag-raising ceremony to be held in front of Town Hall on February 11, 2017.

Voted this 23rd day of January 2017.

Amherst Select Board

Alisa V. Brewer, Chair

Constance E. Kruger

Douglas W. Slaughter

Andrew J. Steinberg

James J. Wald